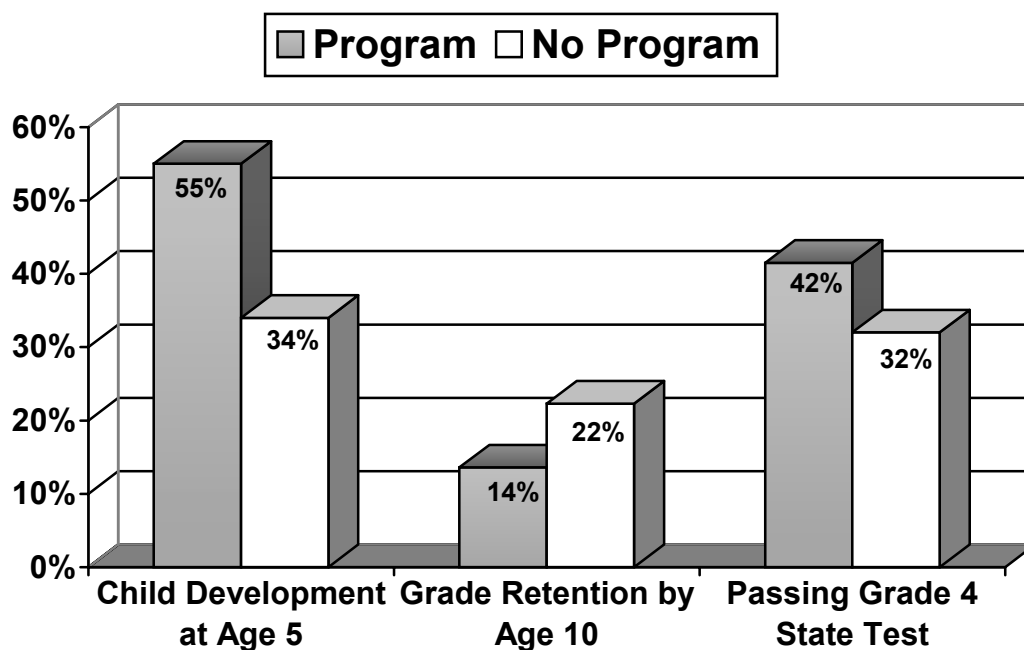


## State-Funded Preschool Program Works for Children at Risk



At-risk children who participated in a state-funded preschool program are better prepared when they enter school and achieve at higher rates on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test, according to a conclusive study.

Children who enter the Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP), Michigan's preschool program for 4-year-olds at risk of school failure, are better prepared when they enter school and continue to do better five years later.

Compared on the MEAP at grade 4 to their classmates of similar background who did not attend the program, 30 percent more preschool graduates passed the literacy and mathematics test. Study results also indicated that 38 percent fewer children in the program needed to repeat a grade level.

These findings come from the latest evaluation of the program, conducted by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation of Ypsilanti for the Michigan State Board of Education.

"We are thrilled with these results, because they clearly indicate that intervention of this nature for at-risk children works," said Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins. "We now have concrete proof that supports what teachers throughout Michigan can tell you: *Early childhood education and intervention is crucial to the success of all children.*"

MSRP, which began in 1985, serves about 26,000 children each year in 467 school districts and 65 community agencies. Children qualify for the program by having at least 2 of 25 risk factors, such as low income and living in a single-parent family.

The program received \$84.9 million in state funding in the 2002–2003 fiscal year.

“The State Board has placed a high priority on early childhood education to raise the achievement level,” said Kathleen N. Straus, State Board President. “These results are extremely encouraging, and we are especially pleased to see these kinds of results from a vital Michigan program.”

Each class has a certified teacher and a trained assistant teacher to serve no more than 16 children. Observers have given the classes high-quality ratings, averaging 4.4 on a 5-point scale.

Based on these study results, the program annually prevents an estimated 2,500 Michigan children from having to repeat a grade, saving the state nearly \$12 million per year.

The evaluation followed through fourth grade children who entered kindergarten in 1996 at sites around Michigan – 338 children who had participated in the Michigan School Readiness Program and 258 nonparticipating comparison children who were like the program children in age and socioeconomic status. The evaluation sites were in and around Detroit, Grand Rapids, Grayling, Kalamazoo, Muskegon, and Port Huron.

From kindergarten through fourth grade, elementary school teachers rated the children who had attended the preschool program significantly more academically ready for school than their no-program classmates – more interested in school; more likely to take initiative, have good attendance, and retain learning; and stronger in reading, mathematics, thinking, problem solving, and working with others.

When these children entered kindergarten in 1995, observers rated the preschool program graduates significantly better than their no-program classmates in language and literacy, music and movement, initiative, and social relations. As compared to parents of no-program children, parents of children who had attended the preschool program became significantly more involved in their children's school activities and talked with their children's elementary school teachers more.

Because the schools and agencies that provide the program are at capacity, across the state the program lacks classroom space and funding for 16,000 eligible children a year.

“Dollars we invest in early childhood education today are an insurance policy against dollars we might be forced to spend tomorrow on social services and prison cells,” Watkins said. “By investing early, we can ensure that all children, regardless of economic background, primary language, ability, or level of parental support, are successful. We cannot afford to fail them.”

The full report of this evaluation can be accessed at the High/Scope Web site at <http://www.highscope.org/Research/MsrpEvaluation/msrpmmain.htm>

High/Scope<sup>®</sup> Educational Research Foundation is an independent nonprofit organization founded in 1970 in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Its mission is to seek, apply, and disseminate knowledge about education and human development, especially as it relates to its educational approach based on active, participatory learning.